

# EDITORIALS

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## Alternative Methods of Health Care

IN THIS ISSUE the editors present several papers addressing the humanistic medicine and holistic health movement, its meaning and relationships to orthodox medicine. These papers are intended to begin a forum that will continue for several issues. No attempt was made to list or to describe the many and varied activities which have found or seek a place within these concepts. Rather the papers are by persons considered to be knowledgeable in some of the broader aspects of the subjects, who also have familiarity with orthodox or allopathic medicine.

It will be noted that all of these first papers originated in California. A perusal of a compendium of resources for persons interested in this growing movement<sup>1</sup> indicates that there has been far more interest in these "alternative" methods of health care in California than almost anywhere else, although there is good evidence that this interest has begun to spread throughout the West and elsewhere. It is hoped that as responses come in from other states, they will be as well represented as California in the forum as it develops.

It is easy to dismiss movements such as this as being mostly unscientific quackery practiced by charlatans whose primary purpose is personal gain. To some extent this may indeed be the case, but it may not be wholly so. The quackery aspects of the subject, whatever they may be, are only lightly touched upon in this series of papers. Rather the focus is more upon the meaning of what is occurring and what might be its importance for medicine, for patient care, and for improving the health and well-being of mankind in this interdependent world. No doubt much will be added and many things will be rounded out by further comments from readers and others.

—MSMW

### REFERENCE

1. The Holistic Health Handbook—Compiled by the Berkeley Holistic Health Center. Berkeley, CA, And/Or Press, 1978

## Treatment of Cardiac Arrhythmias

ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE appears a Medical Staff Conference on the treatment of cardiac arrhythmias. The subject is both important and timely, in large measure because disturbances of cardiac rhythm constitute a major cause of morbidity and mortality from cardiovascular disease. No single area of basic or clinical cardiovascular investigation has received greater emphasis within the last five years. As a consequence of those investigations, most of us feel that we are on the threshold of a major breakthrough in treatment, to which medical and surgical approaches will contribute importantly. There are five presentations in this conference, covering physiology, pharmacology, medical evaluation, medical treatment and surgical treatment. The contributors and their subjects represent the views of the continuum of investigators in their field. The authors have presented the positive side of the information and balance. I will highlight a few of those points, but also identify certain areas in each category where there are gaps in our information and where more investigation is necessary.

Emphasis has been placed in the last ten years on the application of microelectrode studies to understanding the action potential, differences between various regions of the heart and the ionic basis for the action potential. Many data that contribute to our understanding of normal impulse formation and conduction are available. In contrast, we know very little about the effects of disease on electrical properties of the cardiac cell and on the nature of couplings between cells that determine their electrophysiologic characteristics. Certainly, one of the new frontiers in cardiac electrophysiology will be the systematic and careful analysis of the action potential and membrane properties of diseased human tissues. Without this information we are not likely to have a firm foundation on which to understand the basis of alterations of rhythm in man.